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Title: Lab Groups partner to change street sign New spelling honors culture, revisits weapons legacy

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Title:

Lab Groups partner to change street sign
New spelling honors culture, revisits weapons legacy

Abstract:

This is a LANL Today article. It offers a brief historical overview of the Lab's presence on Enewetak Atoll for weapons testing purposes. It explains the Lab's efforts to change the spelling of Eniwetok Drive to Enewetak Drive to reflect the preferred spelling of residents of Enewetak Atoll. The purpose is historical and cultural education.

Box:

You're invited

In celebration of [Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month](#), join the Asian Pacific Islander Employee Resource Group, Lab leadership, and historians for the changing of the Eniwetok Drive street sign, 10 a.m. - 11 a.m. on Thursday.

The sign change is at the intersection of Eniwetok Drive and Diamond Drive; remarks will follow in the parking lot next to the street crossing. More details are [here](#).



Want to learn more about Enewetak and the Lab's weapons testing in the Pacific? LANL Historian Roger Meade presents "Brown/Eniwetok/Enewetak: The Pacific Proving Ground" from noon - 1 p.m., Monday, May 23. Attend via [Teams](#).

Story

Lab Groups partner to change street sign

New spelling honors culture, revisits weapons legacy

By the [National Security Research Center](#) staff

It's more than just a street name.

"Enewetak Drive" represents a piece of Lab history and recognizes a culture.

For many decades this road on campus, which runs eastbound off Diamond Drive, has been spelled "Eniwetok Drive." The Lab is officially changing the street signs to Enewetak Drive. This is the preferred spelling of those indigenous to the atoll in the Pacific, where the Lab had a significant presence during the nation's weapons testing period.

On Thursday, as part of the Lab's commemoration of Asian American Pacific Islander (API) Heritage Month, staff are invited to join an event to unveil the new Enewetak street signage.

"Changing the spelling shows how much support the Lab's Employee Resource Groups receive from the highest levels of leadership and that our Lab's values diversity and inclusivity," said Roseanne Cheng, co-chair of the Lab's API ERG and a Lab physicist. "For the API ERG, this event shows that the Lab is listening to us and that cultural integrity is important."



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Caption: Enewetak Atoll is part of the Marshall Islands, which are a now-independent island country in the Pacific between Hawaii and Australia.

Shared history, linked cultures

Since it was first named, the street was spelled Eniwetok. The name is a nod to aspects of the Lab's earliest days, similar to other streets, such as Trinity Drive and Bikini Atoll Road.

Like Bikini, Enewetak is an atoll that makes up the larger Marshall Islands in the Pacific. The Lab conducted nuclear weapons tests beginning in 1946 through 1962 in what would become known as the Pacific Proving Ground.

During a 10-year period, 43 nuclear devices were tested on Enewetak Atoll, including Ivy Mike, which was the first-ever test of hydrogen or H-bomb.

"Enewetak – and the Marshall Islands – are an important part of the nation's testing history and, in particular, the Lab's legacy of scientific achievement," said Lab Historian Roger Meade, who traveled to Enewetak with the Lab's weapons program staff in the 1980s and early 2000s, and has written extensively about nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands.



<https://drive.google.com/file/d/11qJO8wRI0KZ-oCjxJh7TUOXv9GT-kwCs/view?usp=sharing>

Caption: The people of the Enewetak Atoll were relocated to a nearby island while the United States conducted nuclear tests that began in 1946 and continued through the Cold War. (Photo courtesy of LANL Historian Roger Meade.)

Enewetak Atoll

The Marshall Islands' official language is Marshallese (called Ebon by the locals), and English is also spoken there today. The origins and meaning of "Enewetak" is not certain, though at least one scholar has suggested it may mean "land between East and West," according to a 2004 history report, "CASTLE BRAVO: Fifty Years of Legend and Lore," by Thomas Kunkle and Byron Ristvet.

It's also uncertain when the atoll's name was first westernized to the Eniwetok spelling and by whom, Meade said. After years of European influences there, followed by a Japanese occupation, the islands were captured by the United States during World War II. The United Nations allowed the U.S. to retain control of the islands, allowing Enewetak to be used as the Pacific Proving Ground. (At that time the United States was entering into its next phase of nuclear weapons development following WWII.)

As such, approximately 150 Enewetak residents were relocated in December 1947 to nearby Ujelang Atoll in preparation for the nuclear tests that would begin the following spring. The first test on Enewetak was called X-ray and took place on April 14, 1948.



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Caption: Operation Sandstone began in April 1948 and included three tests named X-ray (pictured), Yoke and Zebra. Sixty-meter steel towers were constructed on Enjebi, Aomen and Runit islands of Enewetak Atoll to conduct the tests.

The last test, called Fig, on Enewetak Atoll was in August 1958. The Lab's weapons testing on the atoll continued until a moratorium suspended nuclear tests. (Shortly thereafter, the Limited Test Ban Treaty went into effect in October 1963; the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty was adopted in September 1996, but never ratified.)

Enewetak to Eniwetok to Enewetak

By 1974, the U.S. government changed its official spelling of Eniwetok to Enewetak in an effort to better reflect the pronunciation of the name by Marshall Island natives, according to *Elements of Controversy: The Atomic Energy Commission and Radiation Safety in Nuclear Weapons Testing, 1947-1974*.

Meanwhile, residents eventually were able to return to Enewetak after years-long decontamination efforts, though part of the atoll is still uninhabitable. Today's population is just under 700, according to the most recent estimations available.

Back in Los Alamos, "this idea to change the spelling of the street sign has been discussed through the years," said Senior Historian Alan Carr and part of the Lab's National Security Research Center, which houses millions of classified records from the weapons testing era, including those from the Pacific Proving Ground.

On behalf of Meade and others, Carr and NSRC Director Riz Ali discussed the idea with the API ERG and suggested the street signs be changed as part of this year's API recognition.

“By changing the name on Lab street signs,” Cheng said, “we’re showing we’re aware of and respect the identity of the Enewetak people, their culture and their pronunciation.”

Meade and Carr agree.

“Enewetak is incredibly important in our country’s history,” Meade said, “and it’s right for the Lab to be appreciative and respectful of the Marshallese who left their islands in support of the United States during the Cold War.”

Looking for more of our Lab’s history? Read, watch and listen at int-nsrc.lanl.gov.



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Caption: In 1952, Operation Ivy’s Mike was the first-ever thermonuclear device (H-bomb) test. It was conducted on Enewetak Atoll’s Elugelab island, which was vaporized as a result and a crater was left in its place.